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AUTHOR Weiss, Heather
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ABSTRACT

One important aspect of family involvement that has been consistently overlooked is the need to prepare teachers for intensive work with families and communities. This study investigated professional development and teacher education in the hope of providing a framework for developing more comprehensive approaches for family involvement in education. State teacher certification programs were reviewed to see which preservice teacher education currently includes parent involvement, and researchers looked at how teacher education programs are preparing teachers to work with families and to work in schools that are becoming increasingly responsive to families and communities. Case studies of programs strong in teacher preparation in family involvement were also undertaken. Based on the experiences of the model programs, a number of recommendations were made for the reforms needed to make meaningful connections among home, school, and community, including: (1) giving prospective teachers more direct experience with families and communities; (2) making school conditions conducive to family involvement; and (3) hiring more experts in family and community involvement. (WJC)

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Preparing Teachers for Family Involvement

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Summary of Presentation at
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Heather Weiss
Director
Harvard Family Research Project
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Introduction

Among those concerned with the future of education, there is a general consensus that family involvement should be a top priority for our schools. In fact, increasing family involvement is one of the most consistently supported and agreed upon school reform strategies. Educators and politicians alike agree that for our educational system to improve, increased family involvement in education is necessary and desirable.

Despite this consenus, few have seriously addressed the logistical barriers to implementing increased family involvement. While it is easy to agree that it *should* be a priority, it is more difficult to make this vision a reality when adequate time, resources and personnel are not available.

One important aspect of family involvement that has been consistently overlooked is the need to prepare teachers for intensive work with families and communities. We at the Harvard Family Research Project realized the need for school personnel to be trained to work effectively with parents and with other agencies. This presentation summarizes our research on professional development and teacher education. We hope that our research will provide a framework for developing more comprehensive approaches for family involvement in education.

Our research involved three steps. First, we reviewed state teacher certification programs to see which preservice teacher education currently includes parent involvement. Second, our researchers looked at how teacher education programs are preparing teachers to work with families and to work in schools that are becoming increasingly responsive to families and communities. Third, we undertook a number of case studies of programs that were strong examples of teacher preparation in family involvement. As part of our second step, we prepared a typology for a preservice teacher education curriculum in family involvement. This typology partially reflects an expanding definition of family involvement that includes broader relationships encompassing home, school and community.

As a result of our research, we came up with a number of recommendations for the reforms needed in the educational system if meaningful connections among home, school and community are to become a reality.

Teacher Certification

Our research on preservice teacher education focused on parent involvement at two levels: early childhood and K-12. The HFRP researchers (Angela Shartrand and Holly Kreider) examined the current content and method of this education and explored planned changes in this education over the next five years. As almost all states develop teacher certification requirements and program approval standards and require graduation from a state-approved program for teaching certification, we reviewed teacher certification materials from 51 state departments of education (including the District of Columbia) to document parent involvement language in early childhood and K-12 certification. We surveyed at least two teacher education programs from the 22 states that mentioned parent involvement in their certification requirements.

Results

First, our analysis of state teacher certification requirements revealed that many states do *not* mention working with parents or families; those that do rarely define parent involvement in clear, precise terms; phrases such as "parent involvement," "home-school relations," or "working with parents" often appear with no further explanation. Of the 22 states that *do* mention parent involvement in certification requirements, 8 states mention parent involvement for both early childhood and K-12 certification, 5 states mention it for early childhood certification only, and 9 states mention parent involvement for K-12 certification only (early childhood, n=13; K-12, n=17). Only teacher education programs from these states are included in our results on training opportunities.

Case studies of three states reveal innovative and comprehensive certification changes regarding parent involvement. In New York, recent certification changes have coincided with certification test revisions, site-based management legislation, and a state-level parent partnership office, presenting a comprehensive effort at the state level to expand the participation of parents in schools.

In Utah, the state Office of Education and the state PTA collaborated with university deans and faculty to assess and discuss options for teacher education in parent involvement. Instead of mandating new certification requirements, the effort has been voluntary on the part of teacher education deans and state education officials. The effort also has been unique in its collaboration with a parent involvement organization.

In Wisconsin, certification changes have benefitted from the momentum of a statewide parent involvement campaign and are accompanied by a state collection of parent involvement

reference materials for university teacher educators who must now add parent involvement training to their curricula.

Teacher Education Programs

Our researchers then described the experiences and successes of nine teacher education programs. Their published findings demonstrate that teachers are the critical link in making family involvement a reality, and that they need to be taught how and encouraged to do this immensely difficult task.

Our typology for a preservice teacher education curriculum in family involvement was based on several parent involvement typologies, as well as data we collected on teacher certification requirements and from teacher education programs.

Table 1

Parent Involvement Framework for Teacher Training

Type	Goals	Examples of Specific Topics from Survey
General Parent Involvement	To provide general information on the goals of, benefits of, and barriers to parent involvement. To promote knowledge of, skills in, and positive attitudes toward involving parents.	* Knowledge of the benefits of parent involvement * Knowledge of teachers' and schools' responsibility to include parents
General Family Knowledge	To promote knowledge of different families' cultural beliefs, childrearing practices, structures, and living environments. To promote an awareness of and respect for different backgrounds and lifestyles.	* Knowledge and understanding of different families * Knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, family structures, living environments, and childrearing practices
Home-School Communication	To provide various techniques and strategies to improve two-way communication between home and school (and/or parent and teacher).	* Skills in parent-teacher conferencing * Skills in other written and oral communication between home and school.
Parent Involvement in Learning Activities	To provide information on how to involve parents in their children's learning outside of the classroom.	* Skills to encourage parents to promote learning activities out of school * Skills to encourage parents in monitoring children's school work
Parents and Families Supporting Schools	To provide information on ways to involve parents in helping the school, both within and outside the classroom.	* Skills to involve parents as resources; such as class volunteers, tutors, fundraisers, guest speakers, etc.
Schools Supporting Parents and Families	To introduce how schools can support families' social, educational, and social service needs through parent education programs, parent centers, and referrals to other community or social services.	* Knowledge of school-based parent education programs * Knowledge and skills to refer families to outside community or social service agencies
Parents and Families as Change Agents	To introduce ways to support and involve parents and families in decision making, action research, child advocacy, parent and teacher training, and development of policy, program and curriculum.	* Skills to co-develop IEPs and IFSPs with parents and families * Knowledge of parent role in site-based management and decision-making * Knowledge of parent organizations

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After completing an initial survey of 60 teacher education programs in 1993, Harvard Family Research Project selected 10 programs that were strong examples of teacher preparation in family involvement. We contacted faculty members from these programs and asked why and how they were addressing family involvement in their curriculum.

Promising Methods for Teacher Preparation

No one method of instruction can prepare teachers to work effectively with families and communities. Instead, approaches must be comprehensive, integrated, and varied. The programs we studied employ a variety of methods to teach about family involvement, ranging from lecture and discussion to ethnographic interviewing and self-reflection. They offer opportunities to learn about families both in the classroom and in the field.

Programs use various methods to prepare teachers for work with families and communities. One method, self-reflection, attends specifically to attitudes toward families. Guest speakers provide initial contact with parents and other community members at the university. Two other methods, role play and case method, let teachers practice communication and problem solving skills before interacting directly with families. Three field-based methods offer a range of experiences for prospective teachers: cultural immersion, community experiences, and action research. Finally, interprofessional education offers a unique form of comprehensive and integrated teacher preparation in family involvement.

Common Themes: Program Characteristics, Challenges and Case Studies of Successes

In addition to documenting the methods programs used, we also asked about program characteristics, and the successes and challenges in preparing teachers to involve families.

Program Characteristics. Across programs, faculty respondents appeared to be strong advocates of the family-community perspective. They were personally committed to preparing teachers to work with families and communities, and many were instrumental in founding their programs.

Each program had an emphasis on special populations (e.g., special education, early childhood education, urban students, diverse/multiethnic students, etc.). In these cases

innovations emerged partially in response to changing demographics or from the influence of other disciplines.

Most of the programs were relatively small and began as experimental or pilot efforts. Some continue to have provisional status but hope to become an established program or to merge with traditional programs.

Challenges. When teacher educators described the challenges and barriers they face in preparing teachers for family involvement at the preservice level, several themes emerged: lack of resources, lack of knowledge, negative attitudes and university and/or government policies that inhibit restructuring efforts.

Inadequate Resources. A lack of time and money were two challenges faced in preparing teachers for family involvement. Faculty often have numerous responsibilities and limited time in which to meet those responsibilities. This lack of time was particularly noted in programs where only one or two faculty members were responsible for teaching, supervising and coordinating their programs. The process of collaboration, both within the program itself and among the university, families, schools and human service agencies, was very demanding and time consuming.

Inadequate Knowledge for Program Development and Implementation. Major challenges to program development include a lack of successful models to follow and learn from; an absence of research that points to the most promising strategies for preparing teachers in this domain; and a shortage of teacher education faculty, cooperating teachers and school administrators who have expertise and commitment to preparing teachers for family involvement.

Negative Attitudes. The negative attitudes held by faculty members, cooperating teachers, school administrators and preservice teachers were barriers for half the programs. Some respondents cited schools that had "blaming" attitudes toward families or a "we're the expert" approach to family involvement. Sometimes faculty were resistant to address family involvement because they placed a higher priority on subject matter.

University and Government Policies. State and federal mandates, and universities themselves, place many restrictions and requirements on teacher education programs. For example, states have limited the number of education credits that can be earned, imposed

academic majors on education students and mandated various other requirements. Teacher education programs are often required to include many topics within a limited number of courses, making program restructuring and integrating family involvement into the curriculum a great challenge.

Successes. According to program faculty, preservice teacher education has a positive influence on skills, behaviors and attitudes related to family and community involvement. Below, are some of the findings from three studies that support these impressions.

At the University of Houston--Clear Lake, 80% of participants showed an increase in positive attitudes toward minority parents, and 65% of graduates were using the parent education materials from the program 6 months later. Field note analysis also demonstrated that the program improved participants' knowledge of parent needs, attitudes about parents, and the ability to communicate with parents.

At the University of Arizona, teachers reported a number of positive results from participating in the Funds of Knowledge Project. Teachers said they had higher expectations of students and cared more about the students whose homes they visited; students whose homes were visited were more engaged in classroom activities; and parents whose homes were visited came to the school more frequently and expressed overwhelming approval of the teachers who participated.

California State University at Fresno also surveyed prospective teachers' concerns about teaching, and found that concerns about parents lessened with participation in the program. During the first six weeks, 60% of prospective teachers were concerned about living up to parent expectations, and 20% were concerned about being perceived as adequate in the eyes of parents. During the second six weeks, only 2.5% mentioned concerns in these areas.

Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the model programs we spoke with and the literature addressing teacher preparation in family and community involvement, we present the following recommendations for teacher education faculty and policy makers:

Give prospective teachers more direct experiences with families and communities. We must acknowledge that coursework in family involvement is not enough. It must coincide with hands-on experience in field settings that are positive and supportive.

Nothing can replace the opportunity to work directly with parents and community members as a way to build skills, increase knowledge and promote positive attitudes. Such experiences ideally should include assignments or discussions that allow prospective teachers to process what they have encountered and consider how it will influence their future work with families.

Research evidence suggests that the most effective strategy for preparing teachers for family involvement might be to *combine* coursework with early field experiences in a supportive environment. Several authors document the success of such combinations. Both early and later field experiences should be augmented by a close link to university coursework and a knowledgeable cooperating teacher who models good skills in working with families.

Preservice education is only a foundation. In order to supplement and sustain preservice efforts, professional development opportunities for teachers must be ongoing. Two reasons for this need are: first the shortage of cooperating teachers to model good relationships with families for prospective teachers; and second, the need for training that extends and expands what has been learned at the preservice level, so that teachers can adapt and sustain their skills and knowledge base.

Teacher education must coincide with education for other players in children's education. Parents, administrators, teacher education faculty and other school personnel also are in need of information on how to connect home, school and community resources. Workshops already exist to show parents how they can be involved in their children's education. Fewer learning opportunities are available for school administrators and teacher education faculty, however.

Emphasize the benefits of partnership for the school and the teacher. Building partnerships can benefit teachers and schools as well as students and parents. Teachers, who often are overworked and subject to many unrealistic demands, need to know how family involvement can benefit rather than burden them. Teaching is more rewarding and successful when teachers have positive and mutually supportive relationships with families and communities, and this fact must be conveyed in any training effort.

Make school conditions conducive to family involvement. Regardless of the method and content of instruction, the right school conditions must exist in order for teachers to use the knowledge they have learned previously. Low teacher-pupil ratios and ample time to implement family involvement activities make a significant difference in whether teachers actually practice family involvement. This is where policy and school practices should combine to support teacher preparation efforts.

Integrate family involvement into multiculturalism, early childhood and special education. Multicultural, early childhood and special education courses are highly family focused; they are therefore natural places to integrate information on family involvement. In addition, mainstream teacher education programs that want to develop curriculum on family involvement need not reinvent the wheel; they can look to these subspecialties for guidance and advice.

Talk about <u>how</u>, not just what. Traditional parent involvement has concentrated almost exclusively on parents' and teachers' roles and responsibilities. Although this information is important, it also is critical to consider how these partnerships are undertaken--whether they build social capital, promote empowerment and are culturally appropriate.

Reach out to schools, parents and communities. The programs described in our reports show that universities also can connect with parents, schools and communities. The Urban Teacher Education Program, for example, asked parents to design a tour of their community for preservice teachers; University of Wisconsin at Madison faculty described their mission in presentations to participating schools; and University of Houston--Clear Lake surveyed parents to find out their needs. In these ways, teacher education programs model the types of partnerships they want to promote in schools.

Identify schools, human service agencies and community programs that exemplify good relationships with families. Such sites can make excellent field placements for prospective teachers. Prospective teachers can observe a range of approaches to building home-school-community partnerships and can interact with family members and other professionals who serve families.

Hire more experts in family and community involvement. Faculty who have a commitment to and interest in family and community involvement can be hired and recruited into teacher education programs and schools. Graduates who have developed an interest and commitment in the area can later return to share their work and research, and can be recruited as cooperating teachers. Faculty in social work, home economics, and other departments who are knowledgeable in family-related issues can help with planning teacher education curriculum.

Evaluate and disseminate experiences and outcomes. A serious need exists for the evaluation and dissemination of experiences and outcomes of preparing teachers to work with families and communities. Only when such information is gathered and shared will it be possible to bring about change in a meaningful way.

In conclusion, teacher education can and should prepare teachers to build partnerships with families and communities. As we can see from the range of examples presented from our research, various methods hold promise for providing teachers with needed skills in family involvement. We hope that their example will inspire other programs to address this important topic in their curriculum and to search for new ways of providing teachers with these skills.

How to Order HFRP Publications

Preparing Teachers to Involve Parents: A National Survey of Teacher Education Programs (1994) and *New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teacher for Family Involvement* (forthcoming) may be ordered from:

Publications Department
Harvard Family Research Project
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Cambridge, MA 02138
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